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PPS 21 Copy No. 4

POLICY PLANNING STAFF

THE PROBLEM OF PALESTINE

DEPARTMENT OF STATE A/CDC/MR
REVIEWED BY VWOLF JR DATE 5/25/82
RDS☐or XDS☐EXT. DATE
TS AUTH. REASON(S)
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February 11, 1948

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THE PROBLEM OF PALESTINE

A. Present position of the U.S. with respect to Palestine

1. The UN General Assembly on November 29, 1947, by a vote of 33 to 13 with 10 abstentions and one member absent, adopted a resolution recommending the partition of Palestine into separate Arab and Jewish sovereign states, substantially as proposed by the majority report of the UN Special Committee on Palestine. The U.S. Government after very careful consideration voted in support of the resolution despite the realization that the Arabs of Palestine and the Arab States were strongly opposed to the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine. In its support of partition the U.S. Government was motivated by the following considerations:

(a) A review of the statements and expressions of policy by responsible American officials, resolutions of Congress, and political party platforms of the last 30 years indicated that unless there were some unanticipated factor in the situation the trend of U.S. public opinion and U.S. policy based thereon practically forced official U.S. support of partition.

(b) The majority report of the UN Special Committee on Palestine recommending partition actually did represent a new factor in the situation but one which supported the establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine.

(c) Public opinion in the United States was stirred by mistreatment of Jews in Europe and by the intense desire of surviving Jews to go to Palestine.

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(d) The troubled situation in Palestine accompanied by the decision of Great Britain to withdraw as the mandatory power made it evident that a solution of the Palestine problem could no longer be postponed.

2. Owing to its long concern with the Palestine problem and in a desire to achieve a fair solution, the U.S. Government welcomed presentation of the problem to the United Nations and made every effort to see that an impartial committee of the UN General Assembly was set up with broad terms of reference to examine the problem. We consistently adhered to the position that nothing should be done to hinder the Special Committee while it conducted its investigations, and at no time did we directly or indirectly endeavor to influence the committee's recommendations. The decision of the U.S. Government to support the committee's majority plan was based primarily on the view, expressed to the General Assembly by Secretary Marshall on September 18, 1947, that "great weight" should be accorded the majority opinion of a UN Committee.

3. During the UN discussions on the question of partition the U.S. took into account the statements of Jewish leaders that they would be able to handle the situation in Palestine if partition took place. Thus, Dr. Abba Hillel Silver, Chairman of the American Section of the Executive of the Jewish Agency for Palestine, declared before the UN Ad Hoc Committee on Palestine on October 2, 1947:

"The Jewish people in Palestine, I repeat,

will be prepared to defend itself. It will welcome, of course, whatever support can properly be given to it by the UN or its members, pursuant to the decisions of the UN";

and, after noting the UK announcement that British forces might be subject to early withdrawal from Palestine,

"In that event, in order to avoid the creation of a dangerous vacuum which might affect public security, the Jewish people of Palestine will provide without delay the necessary effectives to maintain public security within their country."

4. In deciding to support the majority report, the U.S. Delegation to the General Assembly took the position that this Government should not use U.S. power and influence in prevailing upon other countries against their will to support partition. The U.S. Delegation was instructed that it should explain our reasons for supporting partition but should not exert pressure on other delegations. While it has been shown that unauthorized U.S. pressure groups, including members of Congress, sought to impose U.S. views on foreign delegations, so far as can be determined no undue pressure was brought to bear upon other countries by U.S. Government officials responsible to the Executive. In any event, this Government considered the vote of the General Assembly as reflecting a belief that partition was the best of the solutions of the Palestine problem which had been advanced.

5. The U.S. Government has adopted the point of view that if the problem of Palestine, long a source of suspicion and uneasiness, could once and for all be

eliminated by acquiescence on the part of the Arab States in the UN General Assembly decision on Palestine, difficult as such acquiescence might be, a disturbing influence in international affairs would be removed and the security of the Middle East measurably strengthened. We have expressed the conviction that if there is to be a sense of security as well as a developing prosperity in that area, the countries of the Middle East and those non-Middle Eastern powers who sincerely desire the principles of the UN Charter to be applied to the area in the interest both of the Middle Eastern people and of world security must work with cordiality and mutual trust. This viewpoint has been urged orally and confidentially in the name of President Truman upon King Farouk of Egypt, King Ibn Saud of Saudi Arabia, and Governor General Jinnah of Pakistan.

6. Likewise King Farouk, King Ibn Saud and Governor General Jinnah have been informed of the President's hope (a) that in their disappointment and resentment at the recommendation of the General Assembly, the Governments of the Arab States will not attempt by armed force, or will not encourage the use of armed force, to prevent the carrying out of that recommendation; and (b) that Egypt, Saudi Arabia and Pakistan will use their influence with the Arab States to persuade them not to resort to actions which might undermine the present order in the Middle East and eventually lead to a world conflict in which the peoples of the Middle East might be the most tragic sufferers.

7. This matter being in the hands of the UN,

we have not felt it incumbent upon us to take any additional action in regard to the Palestine situation except to suspend authorization for the export of arms, ammunition and other war material intended for use in Palestine or neighboring countries.

B. Alternative Courses of Action

Generally speaking, there are three possible courses which the U.S. might now pursue with respect to the problem of Palestine:

(a) Fully support the partition plan with all the means at our disposal, including the use of armed forces under the UN.

(b) Adopt a passive or "neutral" role, taking no further steps to aid or implement partition.

(c) Alter our previous policy of support for partition and, through a special session of the General Assembly, seek another solution to the problem.

1. Full Support of the UN recommendation for partition, based on a determination to see the successful establishment of a Jewish State in Palestine

Under this course of action, we would take steps to grant substantial economic assistance to the Jewish authorities and to afford them support through the supply of arms, ammunition and implements of war. In order to enable the Jewish state to survive in the face of wide scale resistance from the Arabs in Palestine, from the neighboring Arab States, and possibly from other Moslem countries, we would be prepared ultimately to utilize our naval units and military forces for this purpose.

In the Security Council, we would seek to give

effect to the UN recommendation that "any attempt to alter by force the settlement envisaged" by the resolution should be regarded as a threat to the peace, breach of the peace or act of aggression in accordance with Article 39 of the Charter. Thereafter we would assist in implementing the recommendation by sending armed forces to Palestine either as part of an international force under Article 43 or on a volunteer contingent basis to enforce partition. Since it is clear that no other nation except Russia could be expected to participate in such implementation to any appreciable extent, we would supply a substantial portion of the money, troops and arms for this purpose. If Russia participated, we would at least have to match the Russian effort in this respect.

Any aid to the establishment of a Jewish state such as described above, and withheld from the Arabs, would be construed by the Arabs as a virtual declaration of war against the Arab world. U.S. assistance in any form to the enforcement of partition, particularly by the use of armed forces, would result in further deterioration of our position in the Middle East and in deep-seated antagonism for the U.S. in many sections of the Moslem world over a period of many years. We would be threatened with

(a) Suspension or cancellation of air base rights, commercial concessions, and oil pipeline construction, and drastic curtailment of U.S. trade in the area;

(b) Loss of access to British air, military and naval facilities in the area, affecting our strategic position in the Middle East and Mediterranean;

(c) Closing of our Near East educational, religious and philanthropic institutions;

(d) Possible deaths, injuries and damages arising from acts of violence against individual U.S. citizens and interests in the area; and

(e) A serious impediment to the success of the European Recovery Program, which is dependent on increased production of Middle Eastern oil.

2. Adoption of a passive or "neutral" role, taking no further steps to aid or implement partition

The adoption of this course of action would involve the maintenance and enforcement of our embargo on arms to Palestine and the neighboring countries. We would give no unilateral assistance to either the Jewish or Arab Palestine States financially, militarily or otherwise. In so far as possible, we would require an attitude of neutrality to be observed by all persons or organizations under U.S. jurisdiction. We would oppose sending armed forces into Palestine by the UN or any member thereof for the purpose of implementing partition, and we would oppose the recruitment of volunteers for this purpose.

Such a course of action would rest on the assumption that implementation of the General Assembly resolution was a collective responsibility of the UN and that no

leadership in the matter devolved upon the United States. We would take the position that the UN machinery created by the partition plan should handle the question of implementation, and that the five-man Palestine Commission should proceed with the task entrusted to it of taking over control from the British. We would leave it to the peoples in Palestine to give effect to the General Assembly resolution.

This course would have the advantage that it would not be necessary for us to become embroiled in the Middle East through active support of the partition plan. At the same time we would not have to alter our original basic policy of support for partition.

The consequences of such a policy, while not further embittering our relations with the Arab world, would not however prevent the situation in Palestine from deteriorating even further. It would not be possible to prevent the arming of Jews and Arabs by ardent sympathizers on the one hand and profit-seeking arms smugglers on the other, or Communist assistance to both sides. Disorder and bloodshed on a large scale would take place when the British withdrew from Palestine. The strongest kind of pressure would be brought on the U.S. to act in the chaotic situation which would ensue. Even if we should oppose any move in the Security Council to send armed forces there would remain the possibility that the USSR might intervene actively in behalf of the Zionists.

Politically, this passive attitude would be extremely difficult to maintain in the United States. It

would, moreover, make impossible any possible future intervention on legal or moral grounds in Greece or Italy for example. The confusion and chaos which would result in the Middle East in the light of a passive attitude by the United States would be exploited by the Communists and might develop into a serious threat to our national security.

3. Altering our previous Policy of Support for Partition and seeking another Solution to the Problem

The special report of the UN Palestine Commission on security phases of the problem will emphasize the need for an international armed force if the partition plan is to be carried out or even if a complete state of chaos in Palestine is to be avoided at the termination of the British Mandate on May 15. If we should determine that it would be inadvisable to join in the carrying out of the UN resolution on this basis, our course of action would call for a special session of the General Assembly to consider the situation anew. Abandoning our support of partition as impracticable and unworkable in view of the demonstrated inability of the people of Palestine to assume the responsibilities of self-government, we would under this course of action attempt to seek a constructive solution of the problem.

As a first step in this direction we would seek to have the Security Council explore other avenues of a peaceful settlement when the Palestine case comes up for its consideration. Specifically we would endeavor to bring about conciliation or arbitration of the problem. We would propose that while working for such conciliation

or arbitrati n, a special session of the General Assembly be called to consider a new solution in the form of

1) an international trusteeship or

2) A federal state,

with provision for Jewish immigration provisions in either case.

A trusteeship could take one of several forms: a three-power trusteeship of the U.S., UK and France, a joint U.S.-UK trusteeship either with or without some of the smaller states, or a general UN trusteeship with the Trusteeship Council as administering authority. Alternatively, a federal state with cantonization, a plan which the British originally favored as having the greatest chance of success, could be discussed. We would make it clear that we did not favor the introduction of an international armed force for the implementation of any such solution.

This course of action would encounter strong opposition from the Zionists. It would, however, probably have the support of the Arab States and of world opinion in general. Our prestige in the Middle East would immediately rise and we would regain in large measure our strategically important position in the area. Our national interests would thus be served and our national security strengthened, notwithstanding the disfavor with which such a procedure would be viewed by Zionists elements.